FOOD FOR (POLITICAL) THOUGHT: investigating factors and behaviors associated with political inferences from apolitical cues in Italy

Gaetano Scaduto, Fedra Negri
University of Milan-Bicocca
Department of Sociology and Social Research

SPS Seminar - Milan, 17/01/2024

TOC

The basic idea

From the Alignment to Associations

Introducing politicultural linking

Data and methods

Results

Conclusions

Appendix

The basic idea

Ambrosi (FdI): "Noi amiamo il buon cibo e vino, la sinistra gli insetti e le droghe. Ecco perché sono una tipa di destra"

di Valeria Forgnone

Emanuele Pozzolo · Segui

2 mag 2021 ·

🟢AUTODENUNCIA🔴

Maschio, bianco, cattolico.

Mangio carne, adoro il foie gras, bevo birra.

Pro-God, pro-gun, pro-life. pro provocazioni.

Testardo eterosessuale, impenitente lettore

The Alignment

- Studies show the **correlation between cultural and political preferences** in many cultural fields, such as **music**, **movies**, **art**, and, of course, **food**...
- Consistently with this, DellaPosta (2020) talked about the **"Oil Spill model"** of political polarization:

Figure: Reelaboration from DellaPosta (2020)

The Associations

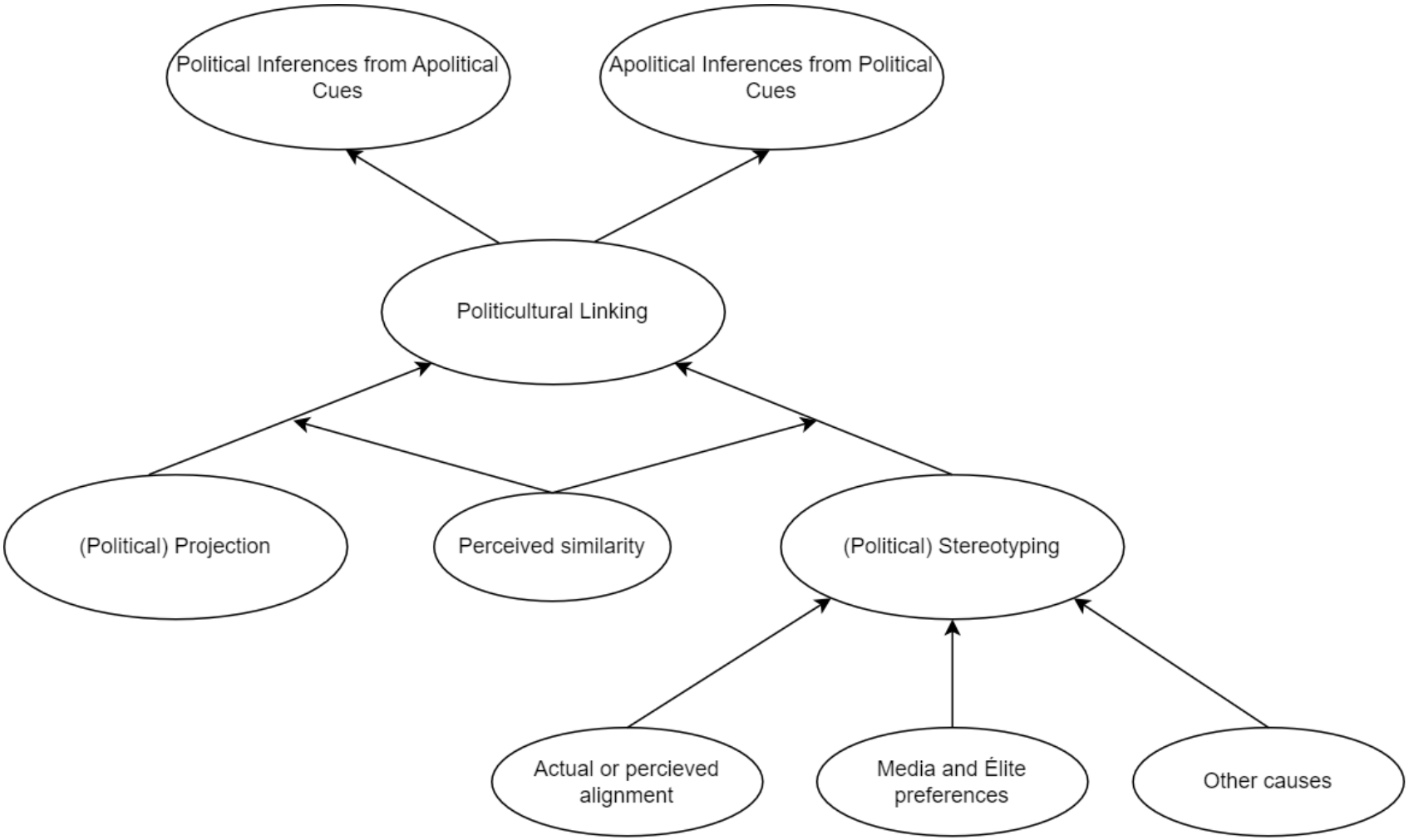
- Observing the Alignment **broadens the associative network** with political ideologies or partisanship
- **"Associative Diffusion"** (Goldberg and Stein, 2018) further reinforces the alignment and associations
- Associations are used to perform **inferences** on the people we interact with (see Carlson and Settle, 2022).
- Moreover, **élite preferences** or **media representations** could also engender associations

Defining politicultural linking

- We introduce a novel concept that has been investigated only through periphrasis such as "making political inferences from apolitical cues" (Carlson and Settle, 2022; Lee, 2021), and mainly in the US context.
- We call this **politicultural linking (PL)**
- We define PL as:

  The act of producing inferences about others' political or apolitical characteristics based on the perceived alignments (associations) between these two kinds of characteristics.

Where does PL come from? (that's for another paper or for the discussion if you like)



What, Who, Why: Content, Associations, and Consequences of PL

The present work is divided in three parts:

1. We will observe the **content and direction of PL** in the field of **food**.
   - **RQ1**: Is there evidence of politicultural linking in the field of food in Italy?
2. We will observe **who is more likely to do PL**.
   - **RQ2**: Which kinds of people can we expect to be more able or prone to politicultural link others?
3. We will observe the possible **social consequences of PL**:.
   - **RQ3**: Does PL have negative consequences on (political) cross-group interactions?

Content and Direction: PL in the Field of Food

- Studies show that food preferences correlate with ideology in multiple contexts, including Italy (Guidetti et al, 2022). We investigate food preferences within two dimensions:
  - Vegan vs Carnivore
  - Ethnic vs Traditional
- We hypothesize that **vegan and ethnic** food preferences are associated with **left-wing ideology** (**H1a, H1c**), while **meat and traditional** food preferences are associated with **right-wing ideology** (**H1b, H1d**).

Factors associated with PL

Not everyone performs PL at the same level. We hypothesize that:

- **Ideologues** are more likely to do PL than people who do not place themselves in the LR dimension (**H2**)
- People showing higher levels of **affective polarization** are more likely to do PL (**H3**)
- People who are more **exposed to news media** are more likely to do PL (**H4**)
- People showing higher levels of **cultural consumption** are more likely to do PL (**H5**)

Possible consequences of PL

We expect that inferring **others belong to the political out-group** is associated with a decrease in the propensity to:

- **Interact** with them (**H6**)
- **Expect a pleasant political conversation** with them (**H7**)

If our expectations were confirmed, they could imply **self-reinforcing dynamics** in the processes of political polarization.

Data collection - Survey Vignette Experiment

Our survey (N=1096) collects sociodemos, Big Fives, cultural habits, and political variables. Then respondents are shown a vignette:

> *"Imagine you are having lunch at a restaurant offering five menus at a fixed price of 20 euros. Each menu includes a first course, a second course, and a side dish. The five menus are:*
>
> ***Basic menu**: pasta with tomato sauce, baked flounder, and mixed salad.*
> ***Vegan menu**: farro and quinoa salad, grilled tofu, and sautéed kale.*
> ***Meat menu**: charcuterie board, grilled sausage, and baked potatoes with crispy bacon.*
> ***Traditional menu**: trenette pasta with Ligurian pesto, eggplant parmigiana, and sautéed chicory with fava beans.*
> ***Ethnic menu**: noodles in broth, moussaka, and frijoles with guacamole.*
>
> *As you think about which one to choose, you hear the person sitting at the table next to yours choosing the [Randomly repeats one of the menus reported above]*

Test of H1

To test **the content and directions of PL**: Mann-Whitney U tests on inferred ideology treated as ordinal variable (H1a, H1b, H1c, H1d)

- Results of the test boring to look at, we present descriptive graphs and discuss the significance.
- Moreover, we inquire on the reason behind PL through manual coding of open answers provided by the respondents

Tests of H2, H3, H4, H5

To test hypotheses on the **predictors of PL**: logit regressions with as dependent variables:

- To say what party the person in the vignette votes for (or "I don't know")
  - *Partisan PL* $\Rightarrow$ Any party vs "I don't know"
- To say what is the political ideology of this person (or "I don't know")
  - *Ideological PL* $\Rightarrow$ Any ideology vs "I don't know"

As independent variables:

- *(Ideologically) Collocated* $\Rightarrow$ Any answer vs Nowhere.
- *Affective polarization* index (Wagner's (2021) index)
- *News media exposure* $\Rightarrow$ High vs Low
- *Cultural consumption* index

We also control for parties known, political interest, sociodemographics

Tests of H6 and H7

Testing **consequences of PL** on cross-group interactions: ordinal logit regressions with as dependent variables:

- Likelihood that the respondent accepts an invitation to have coffee with the character:
  - *Interaction* $\Rightarrow$ "Likely", "Neither likely nor unlikely", "Unlikely"
- Likelihood that political conversation with the character is pleasant:
  - *Conversation* $\Rightarrow$ "Likely", "Neither likely nor unlikely", "Unlikely"

Tests of H6 and H7

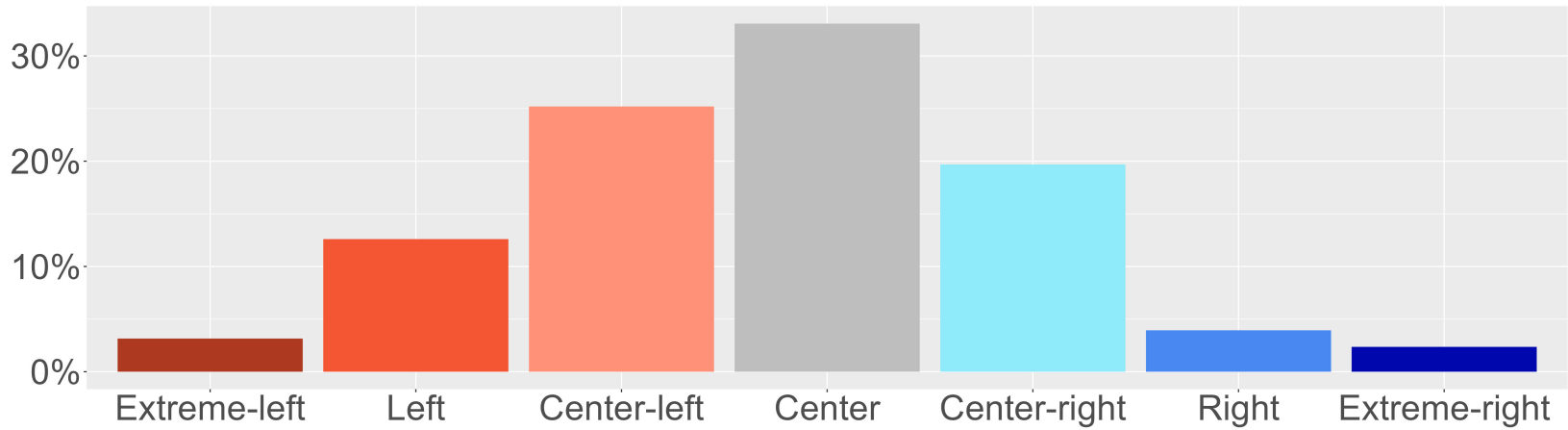
As independent variables:

- First, **Ideological PL**, to see if PL is associated with **Interaction** and **Conversation** overall.
- Then, on the **subsample** of *those that place themselves either on the left (0-4) or the right (6-10) of the ideological spectrum and place the character either on the left or the right*, we estimate model with **Perceived Out-group** as IV (1 if the character is perceived to be in the opposite ideological side, 0 if in the same ideological side)

We control for:

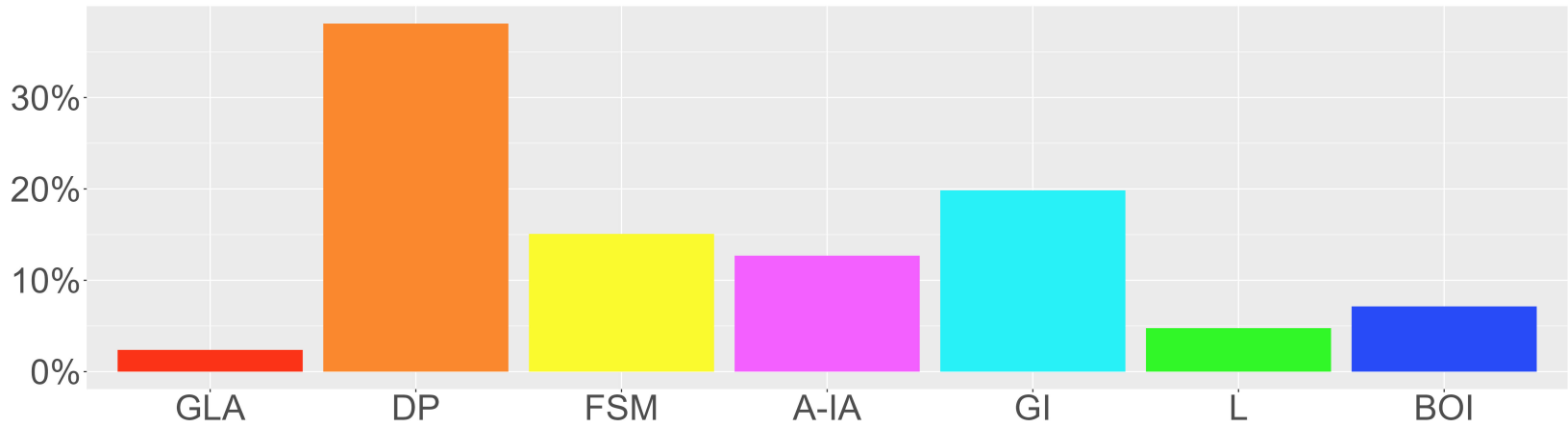
- Parties known, political interest, sociodemographics, big five personality traits

Results - H1



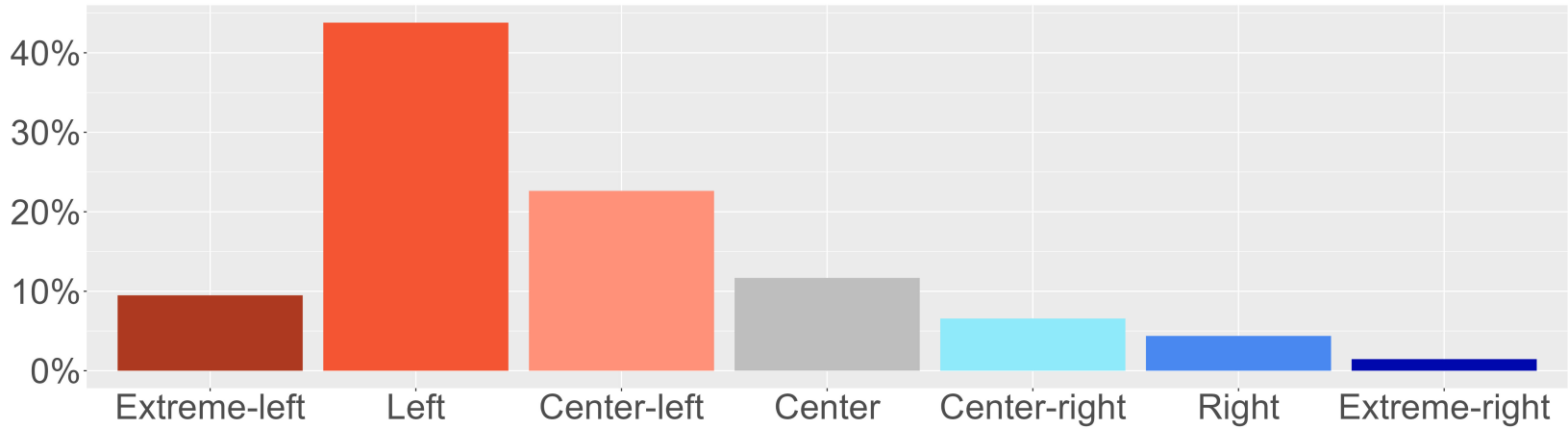
Basic Menu: pasta with tomato sauce, baked flounder, and mixed salad.

Results - H1



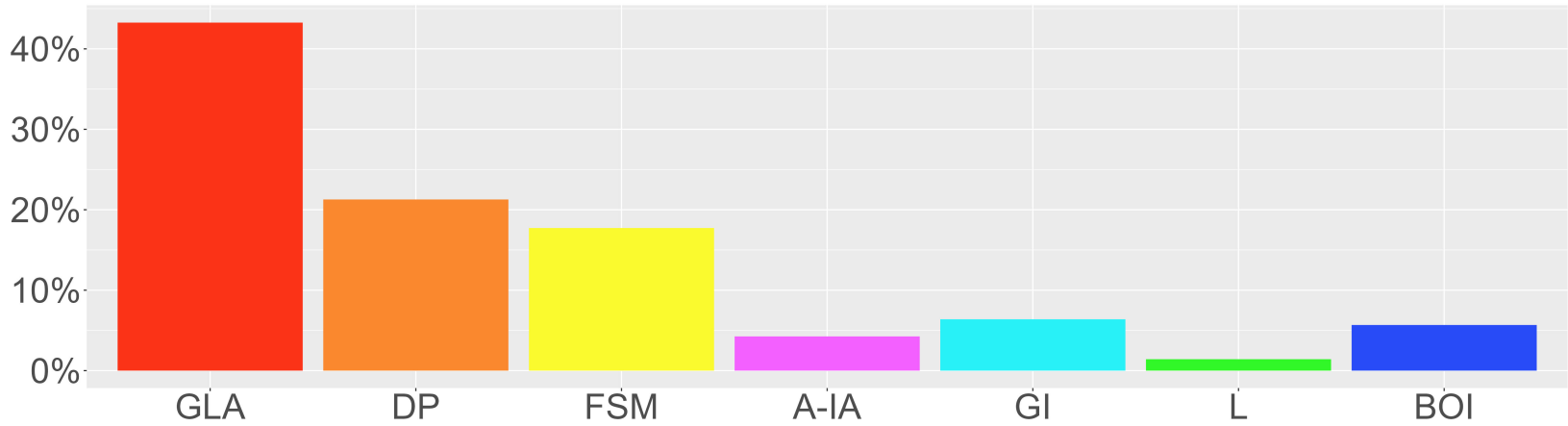
Basic Menu: pasta with tomato sauce, baked flounder, and mixed salad.

Results - H1



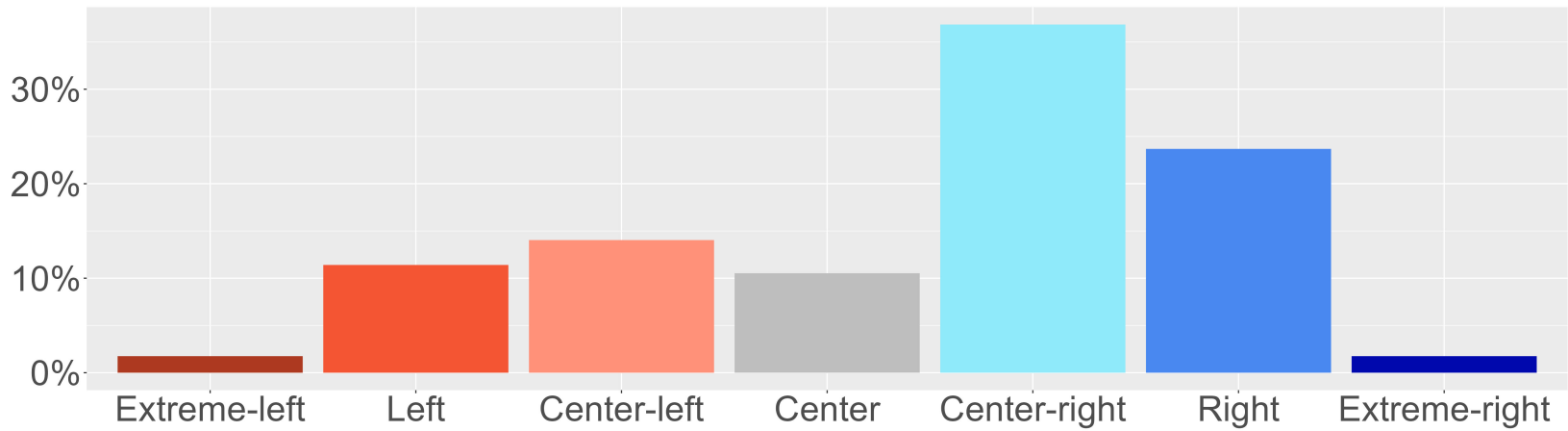
Vegan Menu: farro and quinoa salad, grilled tofu, and sautéed kale.

Results - H1



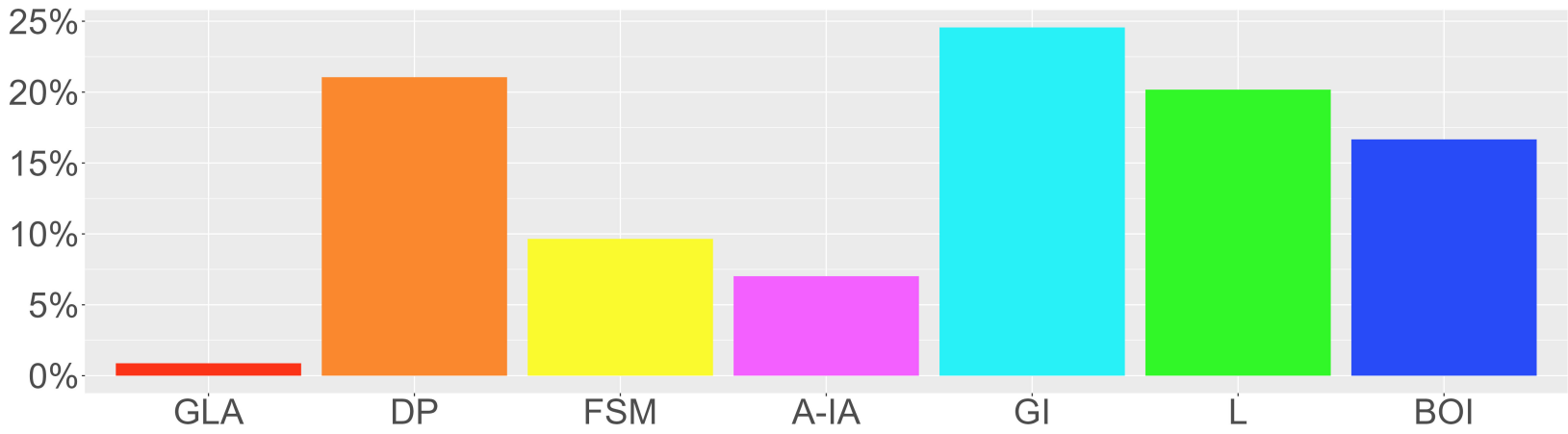
Vegan Menu: farro and quinoa salad, grilled tofu, and sautéed kale.

Results - H1



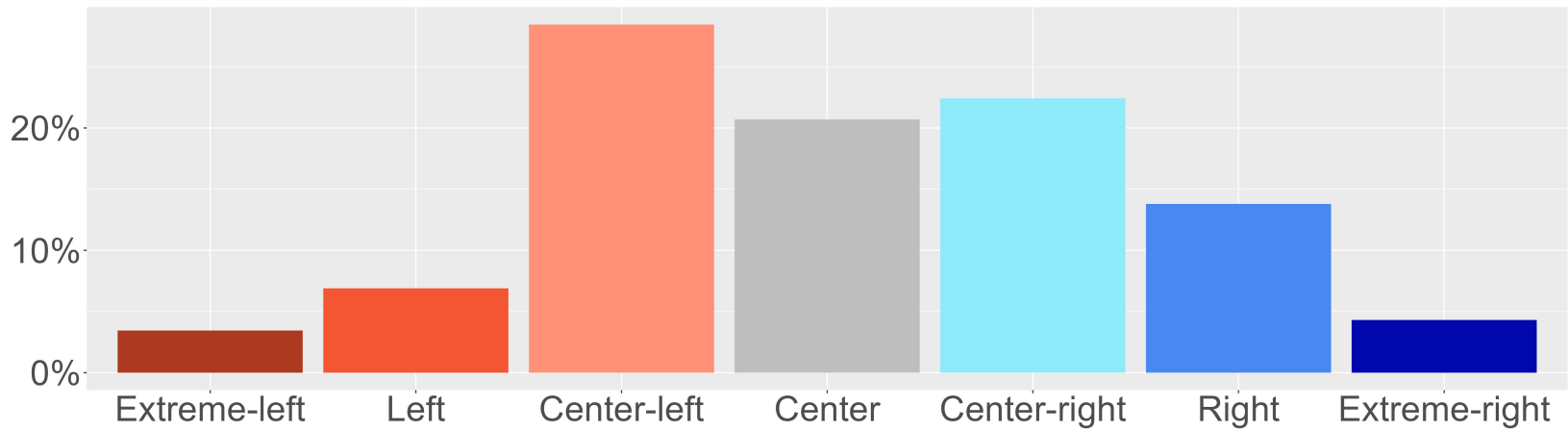
Meat Menu: charcuterie board, grilled sausage, and baked potatoes with crispy bacon.

Results - H1



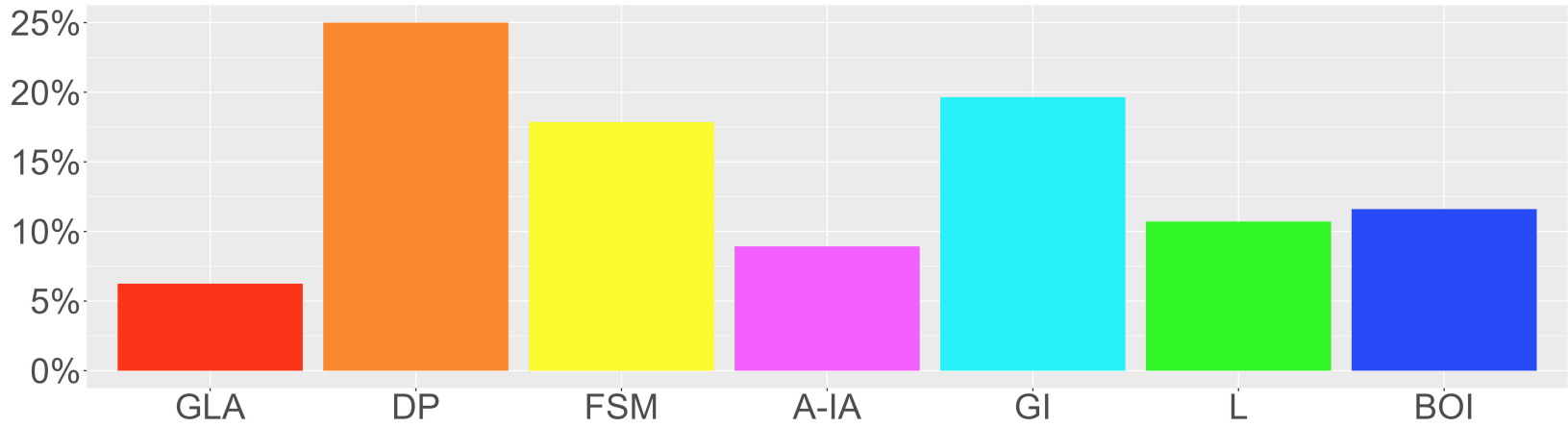
Meat Menu: charcuterie board, grilled sausage, and baked potatoes with crispy bacon.

Results - H1



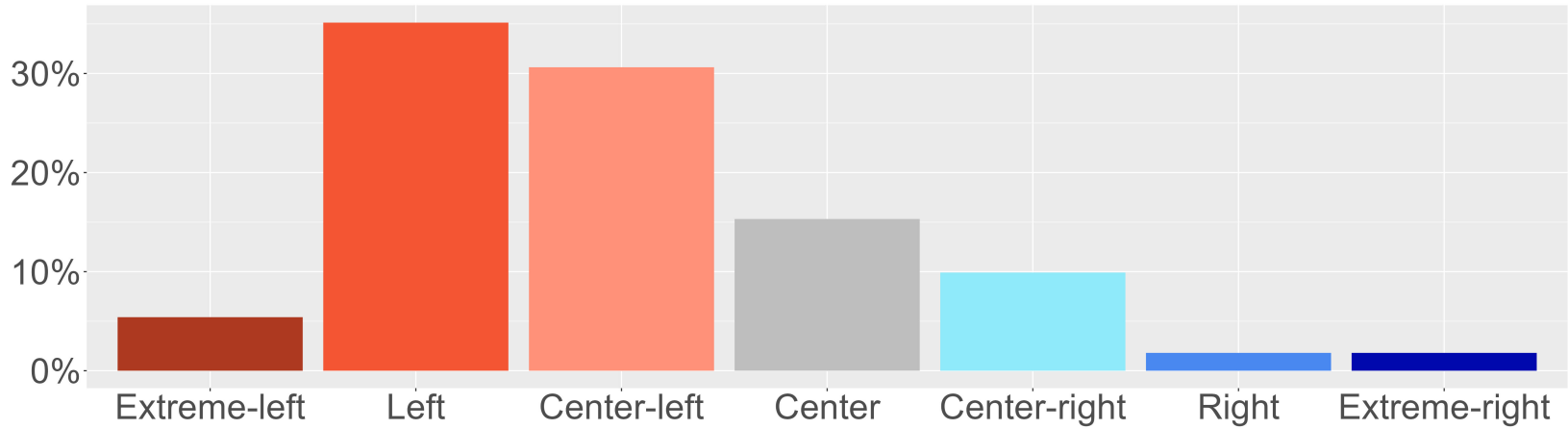
Traditional Menu: trenette pasta with Ligurian pesto, eggplant parmigiana, and sautéed chicory with fava beans.

Results - H1



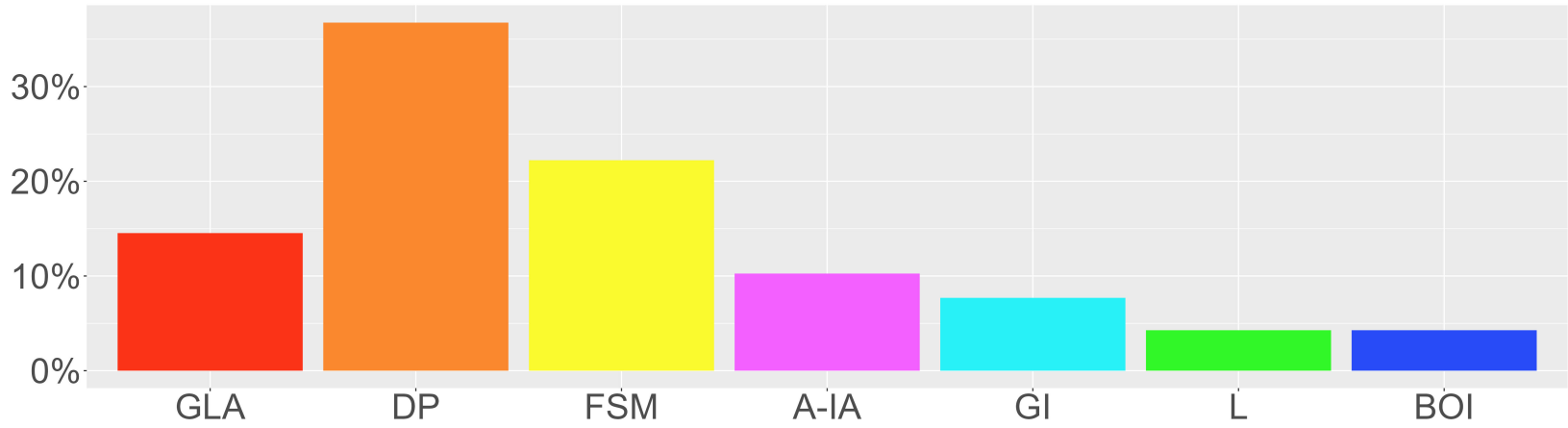
Traditional Menu: trenette pasta with Ligurian pesto, eggplant parmigiana, and sautéed chicory with fava beans.

Results - H1



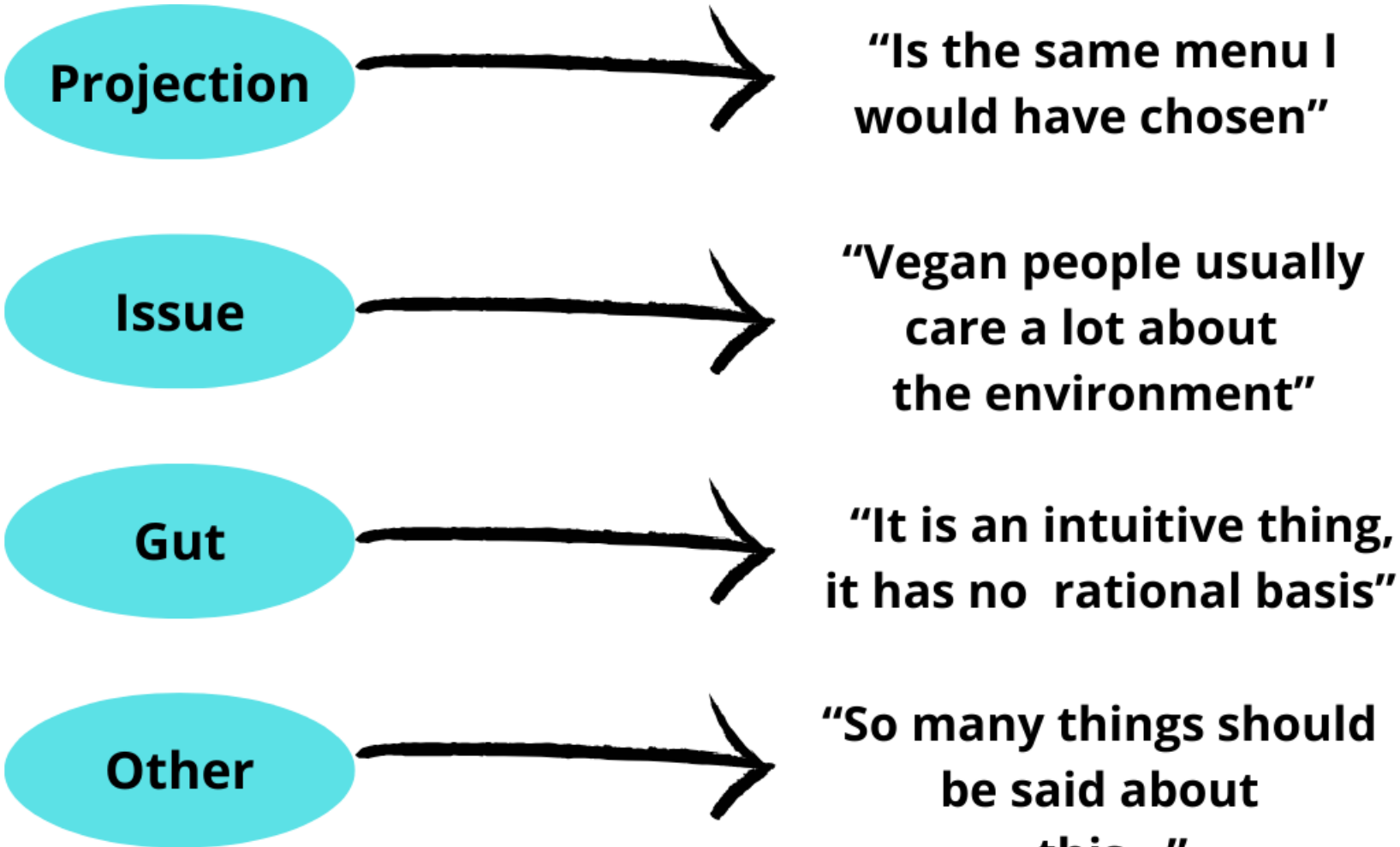
Ethnic Menu: noodles in broth, moussaka, and frijoles with guacamole.

Results - H1

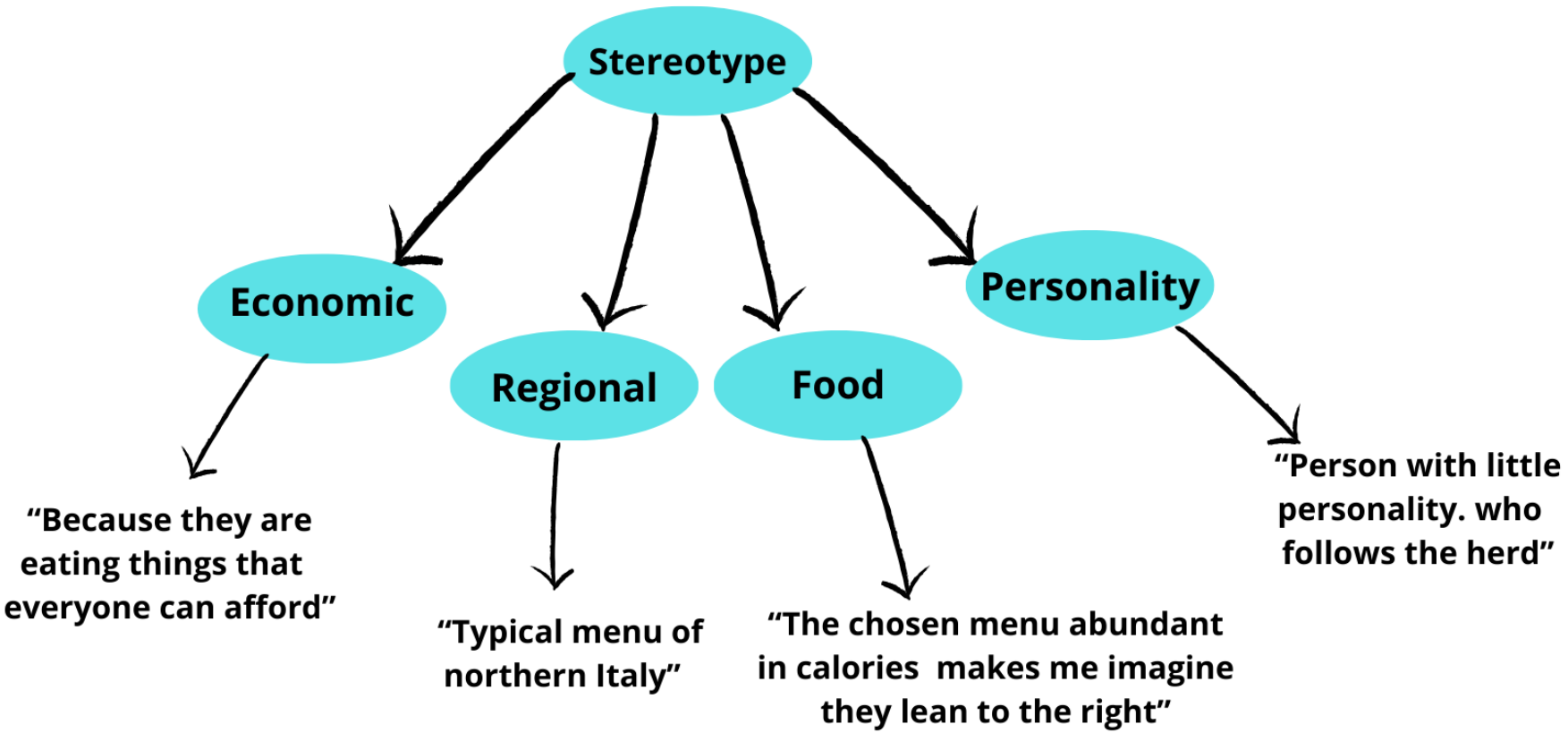


Ethnic Menu: noodles in broth, moussaka, and frijoles with guacamole.

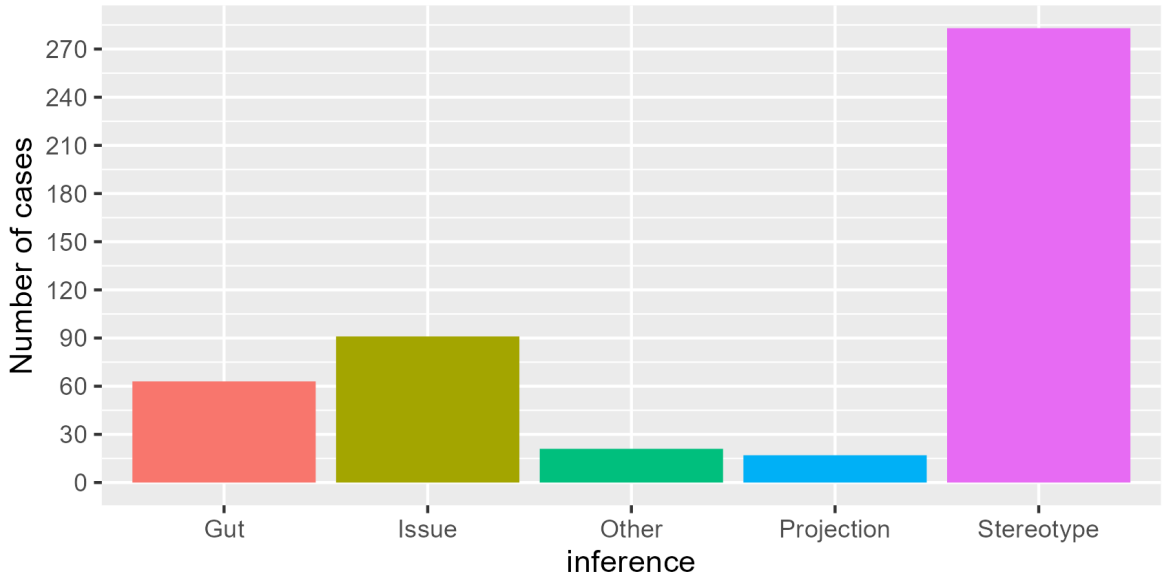
Manual coding: first four categories

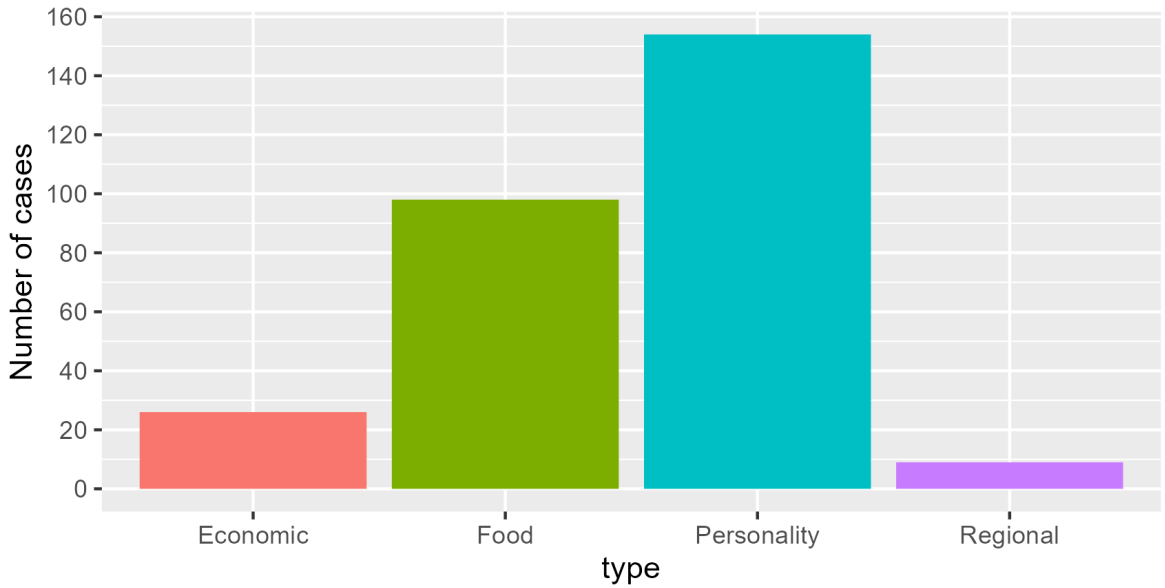


Manual coding: The fifth and largest category



Results from coding of open answers





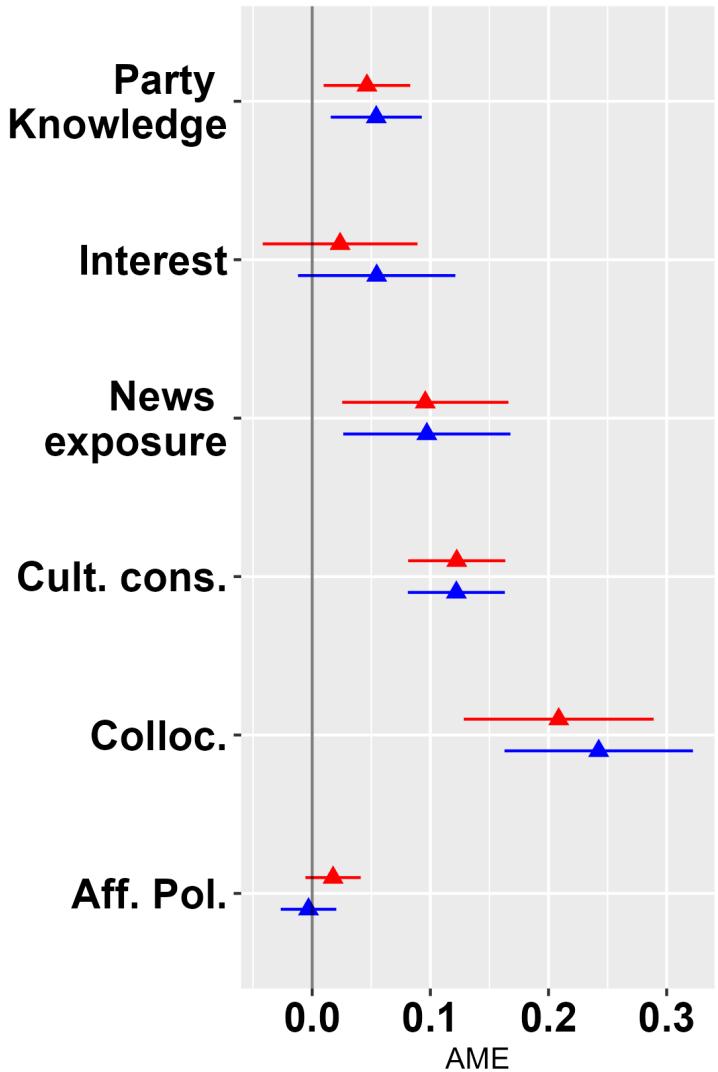
Source of Inference

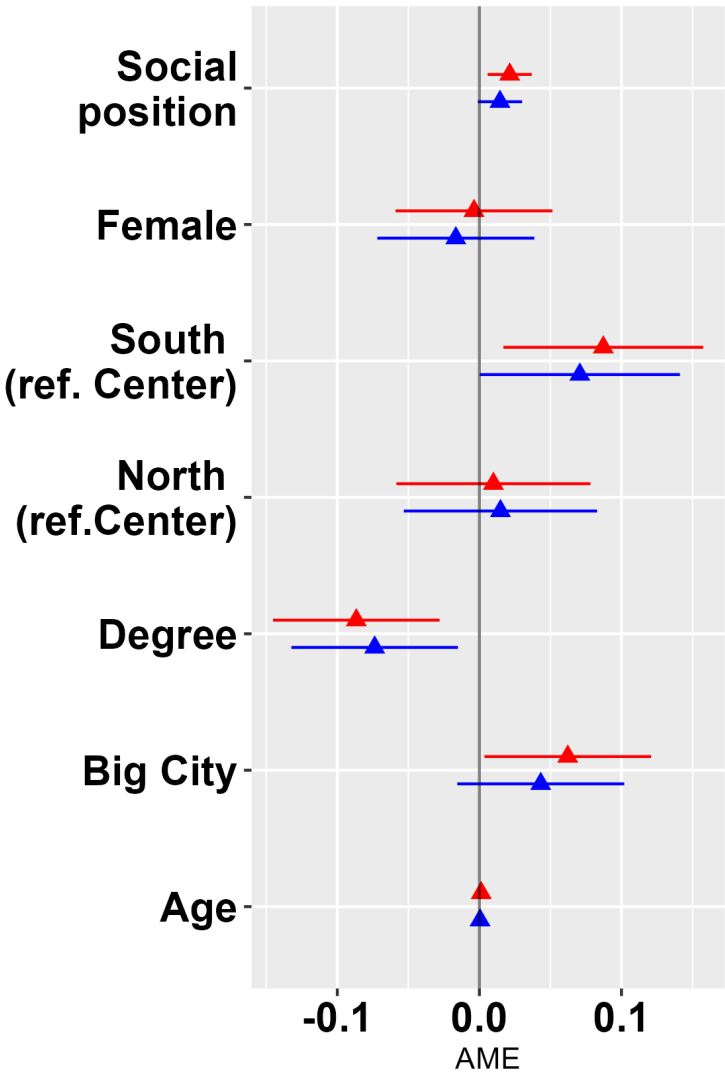
- Gut
- Issue
- Other
- Projection
- Stereotype

Type of Stereotype

- Economic
- Food
- Personality
- Regional

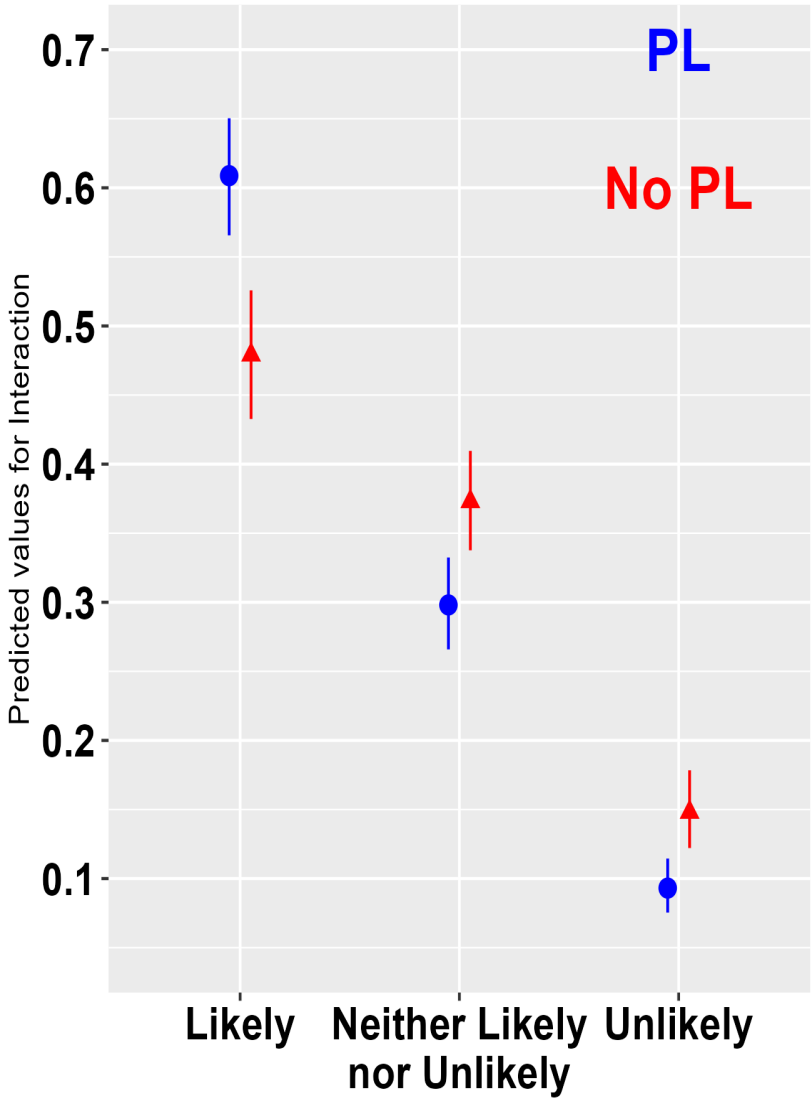
Results (AMEs) - H2,H3,H4,H5

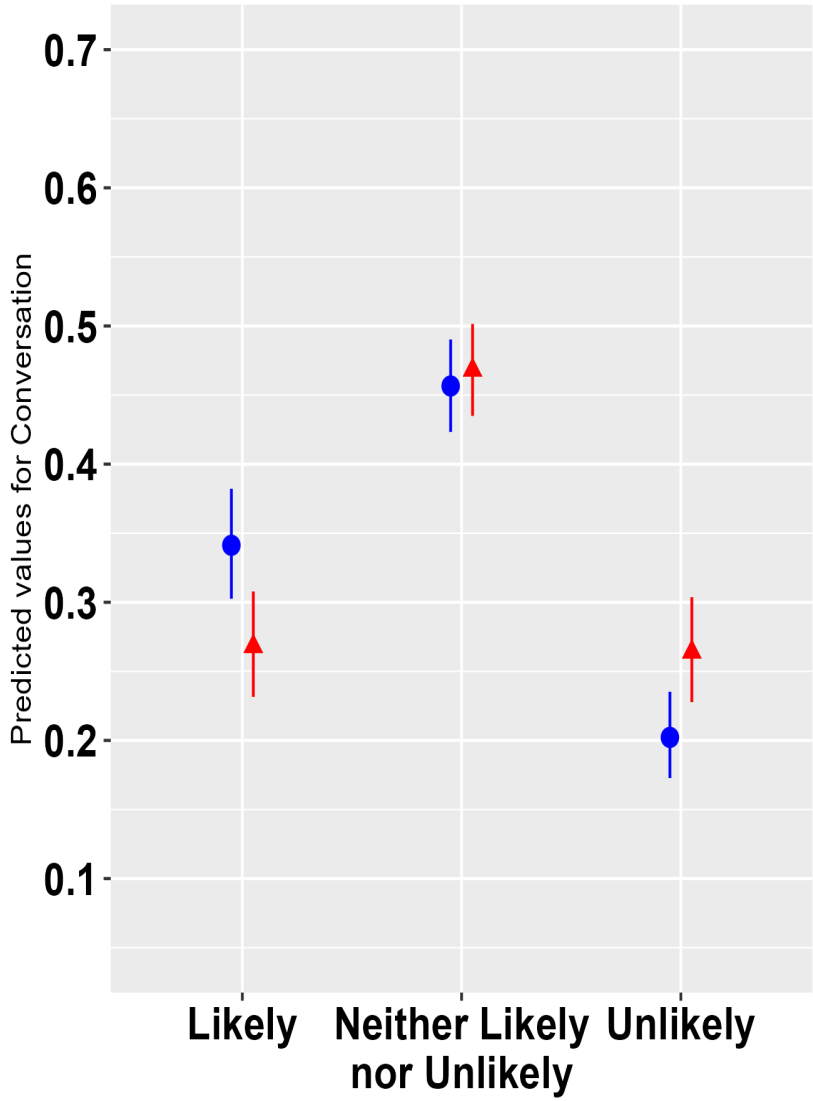




AMEs for models 2a and 2b
Red triangle = Partisan PL, Blue circle = Ideological PL, 95% C.I.

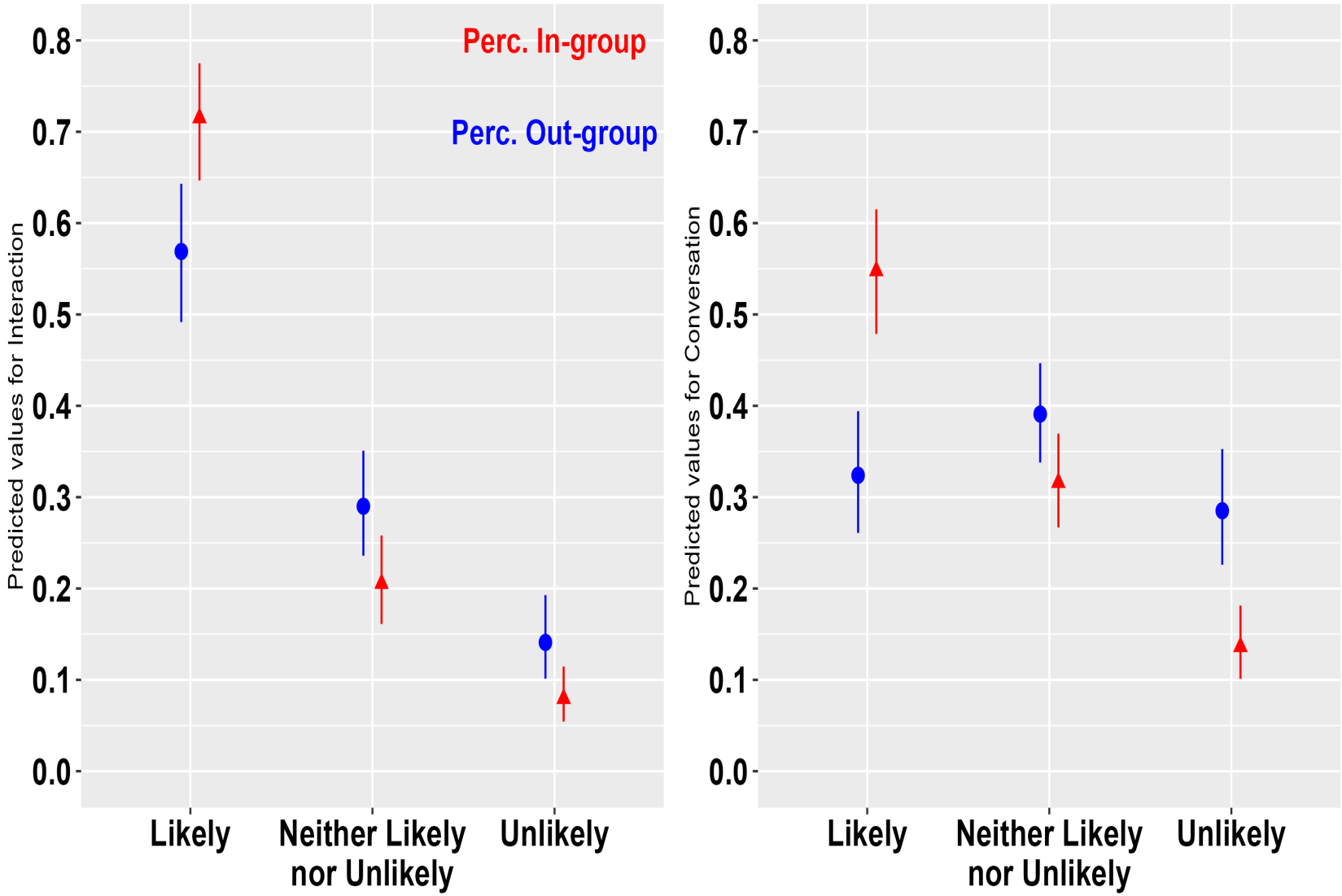
Results - H6 and H7 (Id. PL on Int/Conv)





Red triangle = did not do ideological PL
Blue circle = did ideology PL

Results - H6 and H7 (Id. PL on Int/Conv)



Red triangle = perceived ideological in-group
Blue circle = perceived ideological out-group

Conclusions

- **Vegan/ethnic** associated with the left (H1a, H1c ✓)
- **Meat** associated with the right (H1b ✓).
- **Traditional food** is not significantly associated with either (H1d X).
  - Probably because national identity is more salient than ideology
- **Ideology self-placement**, **Media Exposure**, and **Cultural Consumption** significantly associated with PL (H2, H4, H5, ✓),
- **AP** is not (H3 X)
  - Could be a failure of feeling thermometer-based measures (Druckman and Levendusky, 2019; Gidron, 2022)
- **Inferring out-group membership** is significantly associated with decreasing the likelihood to interact and the expectations regarding the pleasantry of a conversation (H6, H7 ✓).

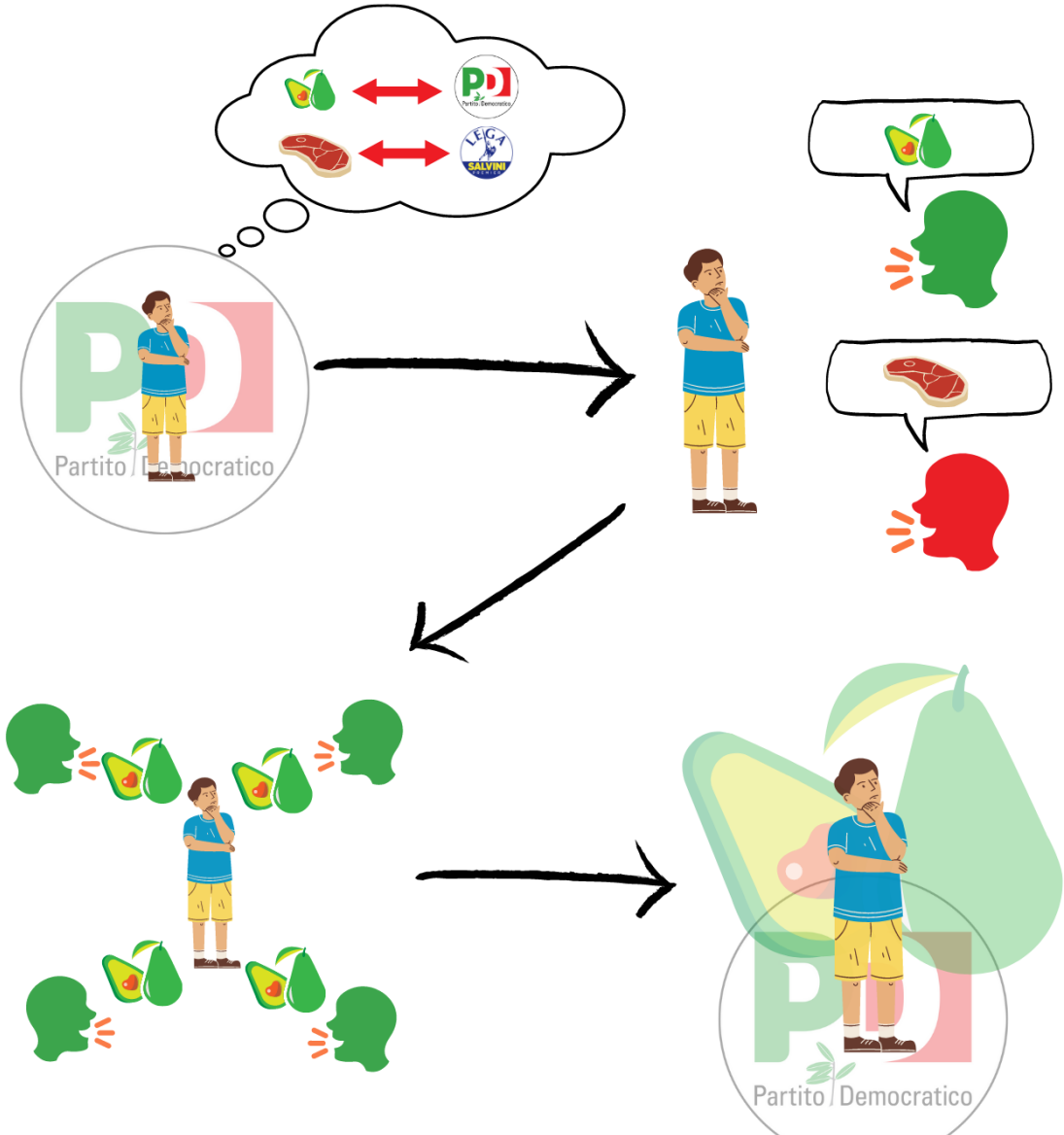
Thank you!

For further questions feel free to reach out at:

gaetano.scaduto@unimib.it

fedra.negri@unimib.it

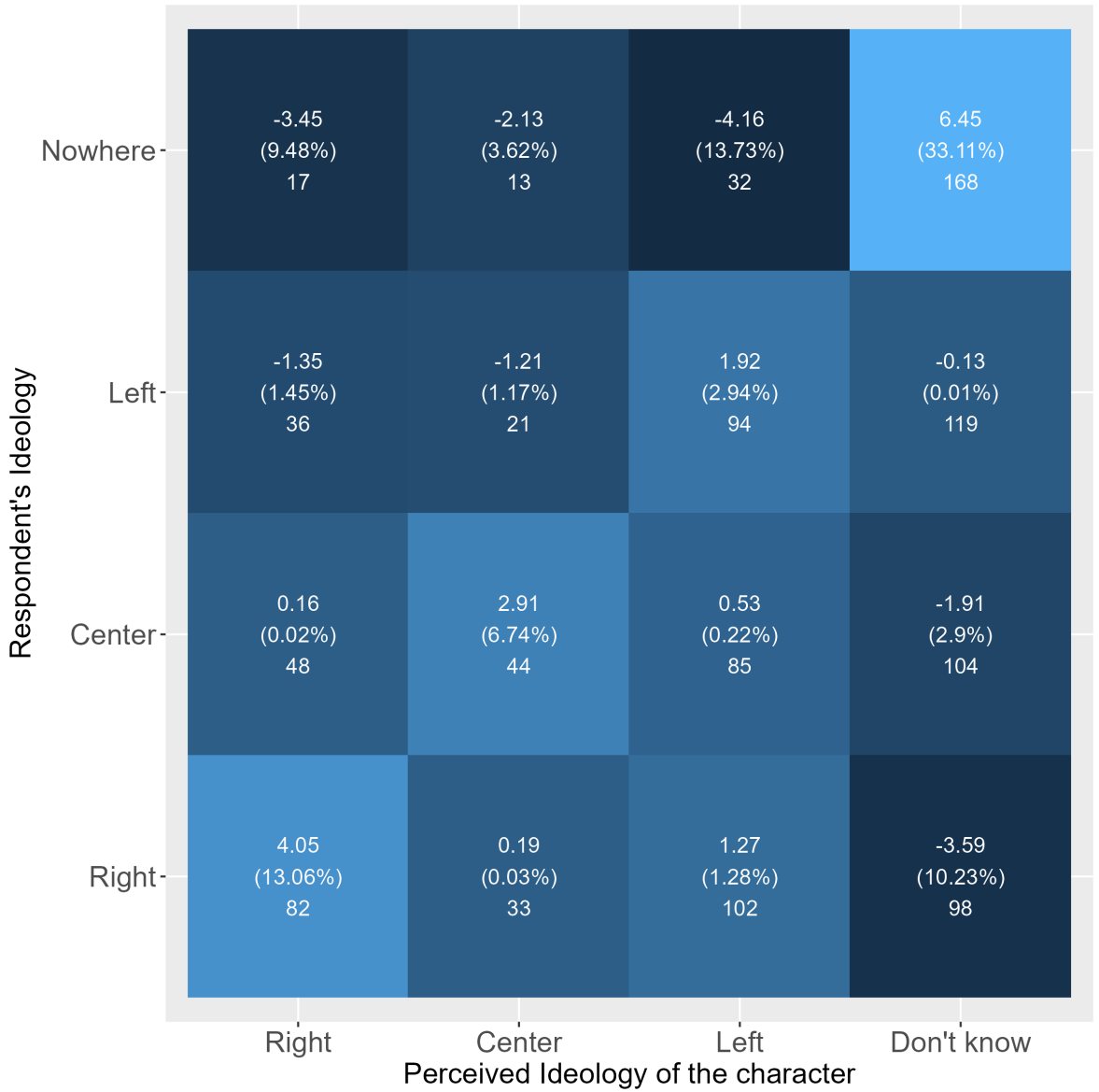
Appendix: Self-reinforcing dynamic of Polarization from PL [Link HQ]



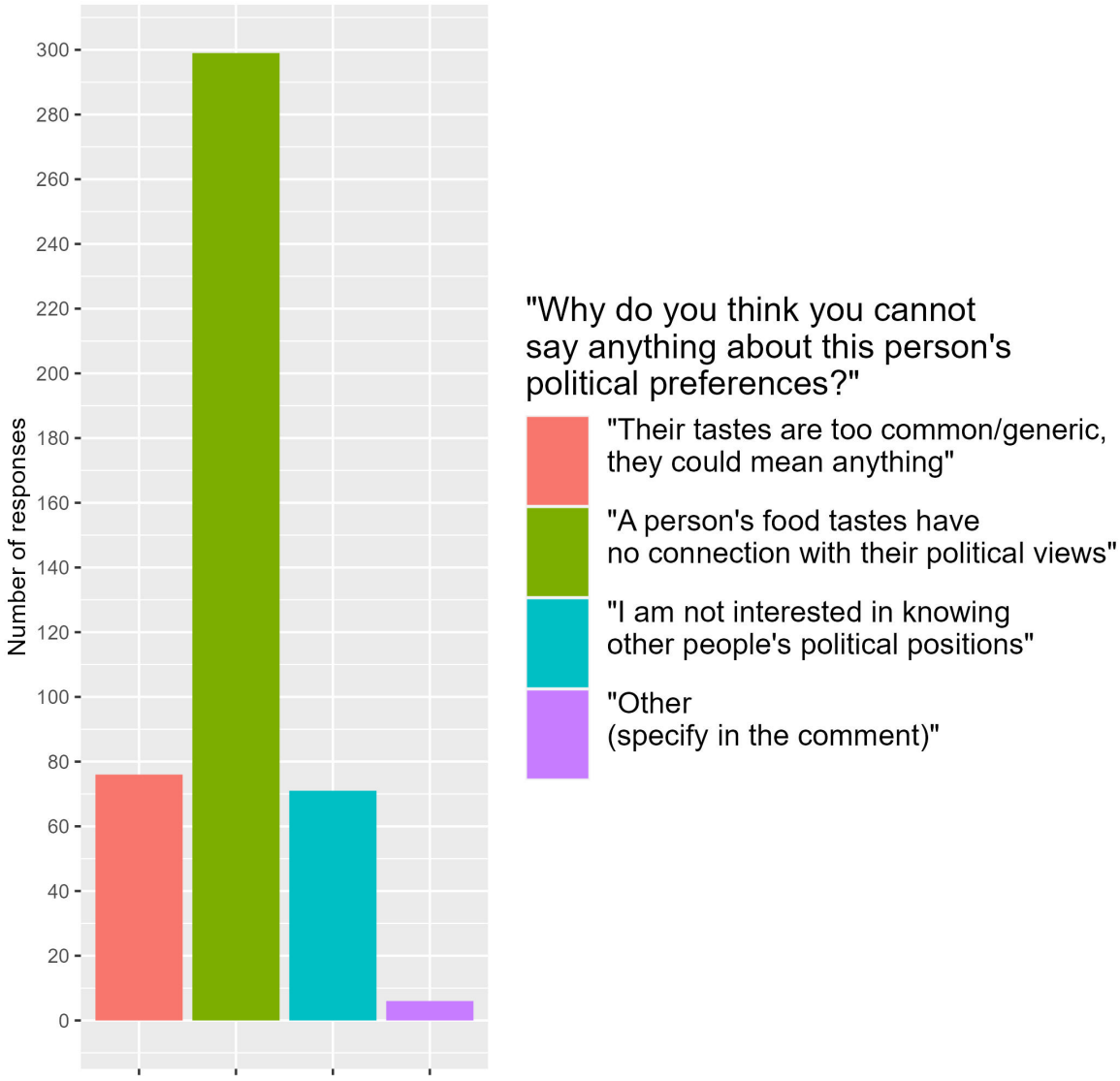
Appendix: details on the survey

- We collected our data through a **survey vignette experiment** (N=1092) on a sample of the Italian population.
- First, we recorded respondents' sociodemographic characteristics, personality traits (Chiorri et al., 2015), cultural consumption habits, interest in politics, political ideology, levels of news media exposure, feeling towards parties, and so on.
- Then, a vignette of a person choosing a **specific menu** at the restaurant is shown to the respondent. The menu chosen by the character is randomly assigned.

Appendix: Projection?



Appendix: Why do they not do PL?



SAppendix: Details on manual coding 1/2

Category	Definition	Example	Number of cases (%)
Stereotype and other associations (4 sub-categories)	Mentions some kind of stereotypical association (see below)	See below	283 (59.56%)
Projection	Explicitly refers to having performed projection	"Is the same menu I would have chosen"	17 (3.58%)
Issue	Mentions political and policy issues	"Vegan people usually care a lot about the environment"	91 (19.16%)
Gut	Mentions concepts such as "instinct", "gut feelings", "sensations" or similar.	"It is an intuitive thing, it has no rational basis"	63 (13.26%)
Other	Anything that does not fit into other categories	"So many things should be said about this…"	21 (4.42%)

Appendix: Details on manual coding 2/2

Subcategories of "Stereotype or other associations"			
Category	**Definition**	**Example**	**Number of cases**
Economic	Mentions economic conditions	"Because they are eating things that everyone can afford"	26 (9.06%)
Food	Mentions food characteristics	"The chosen menu abundant in calories makes me imagine they lean to the right"	98 (34.15%)
Personality	Mentions personality or attitudes	"Person with little personality. who follows the herd"	154 (53.65%)
Regional	Mentions Italian regions/macroregions	"Typical menu of northern Italy"	9 (3.14%)